

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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Whole No. 489

Spring-Heeled Jack

By W. O. G. Lofts



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 161 DAWLEY'S TEN PENNY NOVELS

Publisher: T. R. Dawley, 13 & 15 Park Row, New York. Issues: 13 (highest number seen advertised). Dates: 1865. Schedule of Issue: Unknown. Size: 7½x4½". Pages: 60. Price: 10c. Illustrations: Colored cover (similar +o the Robert M. DeWitt publications). Contents: General adventure tales.

Spring-Heeled Jack

By W. O. G. Lofts

Colorful historical characters were always strongly featured by boys'

story-paper editors in their libraries.

Dick Turpin, Deadwood Dick. Claude Duval, Rob Roy, Jack Sheppard, Robin Hood—there were names for boys to conjure with. Easily the most popular character was "Buffalo Bill" Cody, truly a legend in his own lifetime. Cody was hero-worshipped in both the United States and Britain, and hundreds, even thousands of fictional stories were published about him in both countries.

My father met Buffalo Bill, whose Wild West show was so successfui that it came to London. The year was 1900, and Dad was a thirteen year old. He never tired of telling me how Cody, a kind hearted man, gave him a silver dollar a memento of his visit to Olympia. My father kept that silver dollar for years, until he lost it on the battlefields of France during the First World War.

Buffalo Bill got his name by shooting bison, or "buffalo," on the great American plains. He supplied meat to the Army. In fiction, his exploits became ever more colorful. Aldine, the London publishers, whose headquarters were to be found at Crown Court, put out no less than 1,572 numbers of their "Buffalo Bill Library" (later "Novels") between 1899 and 1932.

These books ran to three different series, some of them being reprints of earlier series—which in turn, were reprints of serials from other publications.

Many of the stories originated in America.

Another once live character who was used by Aldine for a short running series of 12 numbers in 1904 was an extraordinary one to say the least. Neither a criminal nor hero, Spring-Heeled Jack could be termed simply as a mischief maker, whose colorful and fantastic exploits starting in London around 1837 brought not only front page news, but terror and consternation to the public at large. The reign of this mysterious individual seemingly carried on for over forty years! without him ever being caught, when like Jack the Ripper his true identity was never discovered.

It was in the year that Queen Victoria came to the throne, that rumors spread in the City of London, that a wild incredible being, possessing miraculous powers had been seen. Fantastic stories were being related about his appearance, but the general impression was that he was of gigantic proportions, to have wings like a bat or giant eagle, the horns of a goat or devil, and a long tail. The most dreadful thing about him was that he breathed colorful flames, and leapt high walls with the greatest of ease. It was from this latter fact, that he was aptly christened with the title of Spring-Heeled Jack.

Large numbers of reports of attacks by this fearful creature had been brought before the attention of the authorities, but were not much taken notice of. The London Police Force it should be added had not long been formed,

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and its numbers were extremely small. They already had their hands full in dealing with the large numbers of pickpockets, rogues, and vagabonds—and even a few Highwaymen, than to deal with what they thought was the vivid intoxicated ramblings of people under the influence of the demon drink!

They were, however, stirred into activity in February 1838, when a girl of sound and sensible reputation, and living at Bow, East London, reported that a man had knocked on her door claiming he was a Police Officer, and that he had captured Spring-Heeled Jack! Asking her to bring a candle because it was dark, and when handing it to him, he suddenly threw off his large cloak, and presenting the light to his breast, exhibited a most hideous and horrible appearance. He breathed blue and white flames and his eyes were so vivid red and rolling that they seemed like balls of fire. Wearing a large helmet, and a close fitting white dress—he then attacked her with his claws, which were seemingly of a metallic substance, and tore open her gown. Her screams quickly brought her family, and a host of neighbors to her help and although being seen by dozens of witnesses he managed to flee successfully into the darkness.

Despite extensive police enquiries, interviews, and a thorough search of the district, nothing was ever found, and further reports of Spring-Heeled Jack's activities flooded the authorities, and even letters were sent to the Lord Mayor in protest in the inefficiency of the Police Force in not laying the culprit to heels. To this effect, he offered a large reward, and even swore in special constables. Another girl living in Lambeth, and whilst walking down the aptly named "Green Dragon Lane" saw a tall thin gentleman standing in a passage, carrying a Bullseye Lantern as issued by the police. As she passed him, he suddenly sprung out, and opening his dark long cloak, spurted blue flames to her face. So shocked was she, that the unfortunate girl was seized with a series of fainting fits, for some time afterwards.

The exploits of Spring-Heeled Jack just grew and grew, and one most remarkable event, and which was seen by dozens of witnesses, was that a creature of horrible appearance had been seen, climbing up the face of a church in the vicinity of Bow. Having mounted the tall spire, he seated himself cross-legged and calmly looked down at the then ever-growing crowd of onlookers. After a short while, he rose, and disappeared from view. Once again a search of the area was instituted but nothing was found. Another report said he had climbed the walls and dropped into the mighty Tower of London, and a search by the Beefeaters proved fruitless. This caused as much excitement as when Colonel Blood had stolen the Crown Jewels several decades earlier. Such was the terror caused by Spring-Heeled Jack that men armed themselves in the streets, but of no avail he simply could not be brought to his heels-though the pun was no laughing matter to the public at large. Like many cases of this kind, imitators came on the scene, which confused matters, as "Jack" was reported seen in all parts of the British Isles. Proof that there were imitators was when in Warwickshire, one of these masqueraders was run to earth. He was found to be a local youth, a laborar of low intelligence, and who wore large springs to his boots. With the aid of a black cloak and mask he had been frightening the villagers.

The continued activities of Spring-Heeled Jack continued for an incredibly thirty years, when at last about 1878 it seemed that "Jack" was having his final fling. Soldiers at Colchester and Aldershot were being terrified by a mysterious individual who would suddenly spring on them in the darkness, and after hurling them to the ground, without causing much harm except severe shock, would jump away with large bounds like a giant kangaroo. Attempts were made by officers and special patrols to capture this mysterious

person, but like the police force it was of no avail. It was not until ball cartridge was issued and strict instructions were given to shoot on sight that the attacks ceased and the hysteria died down, and "Jack" was seen no more.

Some forty years later in his book "Forty Years On," Lord Ernest Hamilton claimed that Spring-Heeled Jack was none other than a certain Lieutenant Alfrey of the 60th Rifles. His equipment was supposed to have consisted of rubber-soled shoes, and a sheet which was white on one side, and black on the other. He was also a very big and powerful man, with extraordinary powers of jumping. As an example of his skill in this direction, Alfrey used to hunt with the Essex and Suffolk hounds on a grey polo pony about fourteen hands high. On approaching a five-barred gate, instead of putting his mount at it in the ordinary way, Alfrey would vault off his pony's back in full career. He and the pony would then jump the gate side by side, after which he would vault back into the saddle and continue the chase until the next gate was reached, when the performance would be repeated. Obviously, to a man capable of compassing such feats, the pranks played by Spring-Heeled Jack would not be so difficult to accomplish.

Whilst quite possibly Lord Hamilton may have been right, and Alfrey was the culprit in the Army affairs—he could not possibly have been the original Spring-Heeled Jack as he was operating before the Lieutenant was born!

Probably Spring-Heeled Jack could lay claim to being the most unusual "criminal" in history, as his motive seemed purely to frighten people-and mostly women. He never robbed or harmed his victims (except by shock) nor was any sexual motive involved with the female victims. Only a person with some disordered mind could have been responsible, although there is no doubt that others copied him. The accounts of his appearance and activitiesalthough allowing for some embellishment could well have been true. The effect of blowing colored fire can be done quite easy with the aid of a chemical, whilst the feats of jumping and climbing walls are easy to a skilled athlete or steeplejack. Many solutions have been put forward as to "Jack's" identity—the most popular that he was actually the eccentric Marquis of Waterford, who is reputed to have amused himself by springing on travelers and terrifying them. His gentlemanly appearance certainly fits some descriptions of Spring-Heeled Jack, and it has also been said that such was his power and influence in William IV and early Victoria England, that many knew of this, but were too frightened to lay complaint against him.

One thing which is certain that Spring-Heeled Jack did not wear, and that was springs attached to his boots (as portrayed in the several bloods issued about him). To wear this sort of mechanical contraption would hinder a person more, rather than to aid this mode of progress. It is also true that many crimes committed today are inspired by what has been written in books or seen on films. It is quite possible that the inspiration of Spring-Heeled Jack came from the famous novel "Midshipman Easy" written by Captain Marryat in 1836 only a short while before Jack's activities started. Plays of course were written about Spring-Heeled Jack, some even when he was still active. In 1867 The Newsagents Publishing Company produced "Spring-Heeled Jack" in 40 penny numbers, whilst roughly the same period Charles Fox issued a similar story in 42 numbers. The Aldine Publishing Company as mentioned at the start of this article produced his adventures in twelve penny numbers in 1904 in colored wrappers. The latter series must be the rarest of all boys papers, as I have yet to see a copy in 25 years in the hobby. Even the British Museum does not have copies, and to get them today is almost as remote as trying to find the real identity of Spring-Heeled Jack.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Eddie:

In answer to Mr. McIntosh's query as to the author of the anonymous book "John Whopper, The Newsboy," the author was Thomas March Clark, D.D. a Bishop of the P. E. Church in the state of Rhode Island. Bishop Clark was born at Newburyport, Mass. in 1812. He graduated from Yale in 1831 and Princeton Theological Seminary in 1835. He became Bishop of Rhode Island in 1854.

All of Bishop Clark's writing under his own name were strictly on religious subjects such as:

Lectures on the Formation of Character, 1852 (his first published book and was followed by:

Early Descipline and Culture, 1855 Primary Truths of Religion, 1869 Purity, a Source of Strength

And a number of others as well as single sermons.

Bishop Clark's congregation would have looked with jaundiced eye upon the good Bisnop's excursion into "profane" literature. Undoubtedly one reason for the cloak of anonymity.—Stanley A. Pachon, Bethlehem, Pa.

Dear Mr. McIntosh:

Read your "John Whopper" item, and enjoyed it very much. This is the type of fiction which is right up my alley. I collect papers, books and magazines of such stories, i.e. fantasies, science-fiction, fairy tales, the supernatural, the occult, legends, and similar material. Think I may be able to add some little bits on "John Whopper, the Newsboy."

It appeared, under that title, in Frank Munsey's SCRAP BOOK in 1910, and byline is T. M. Clark. Here

is the editor's introduction:

"This famous classic appeared for the first time in OLD AND NEW MAGAZINE, Boston, almost forty years ago. Those who read it then, will doubtless read it with no less interest now. Those who have never read it, particularly those who were still "of the future" when John Whopper made his first plunge through the earth, will be just as keen as their fathers were to know how "it all turned out.' The story, as it originally appeared, was anonymous. The debate that raged about its authorship was keen and prolonged, but the weight of evidence finally ascribed it to one T. M. Clark, who lived up in New England somewhere. And the interest of the story is not the SCRAP BOOK'S sole incentive to its republication. The tale throws new and astonishing light on the north pole controversy. Cook and Peary can fight it out. John Whopper (or T. M. Clark) got there first."

THE SCRAP BOOK has something further to add Under the title of THE AUTHOR OF JOHN WHOP-PER, THE NEWSBOY, in the May, 1910 issue, appears the following:

"The author of 'John Whopper, the Newsboy,' the delightful product of an imagination turned out to pasture, which was published in the SCRAP BOOK of February and March, turns out to have been no less a personage than Thomas March Clark, Protestant Episcopal bishop of the diocese of Rhode Island from 1854 until his death in 1903, and presiding bishop of the church from 1899 until 1903. 'John Whopper' was published anonymously for the first time in the 'Old and New Magazine,' Boston. Bishop Clark was a man of rare charm as well as a writer of distinction. The bishop's summer home was built from the proceeds of his writing."

Following is a brief history of periodical "O & N," as covered in vol. 3 of A HISTORY OF AMERICAN MAGAZINES, by Frank Luther Mott: TITLE: Old and New

FIRST ISSUE: January, 1870

LAST ISSUE: May, 1875

PERIODICITY: Monthly; semiannual volumes. Last volume (XI) has only five numbers.

PUBLISHERS: Houghton & Co., Boston. Jan-June, 1870. Roberts Bros. Boston, July, 1870-Dec., 1874., Lee & Shepard, Boston, Jan-May, 1875

EDITOR: Edward Everett Hale

Here is data from the third edition of AN INDEX TO PERIODICAL LITERATURE, by William F. Poole (1882):

"John Whopper, the Newsboy. (T. M. Clark) O. & N. 2: 49-416."

Although story appeared anonymously, we find here that author has been identified. Most likely Public Library requested this information from the publishers. As to actual dates of appearance of story, that will have to be guess-work. Would hazard a guess it commenced July. and terminated October 1870 same year. Do not have any volumes of this periodical in my files, so above is only an educated guess. Would be pleased to hear if your research on this brings more definite information. Am compiling bibliographies on this type of fiction, and would be pleased to learn of any data you may have to offer .- Tom Moriarty, Seaford, N. Y.

Back numbers Reckless Ralph's Dime Novel Roundup (quite a few reprints, can't be helped). Don't have the complete set of No. 1 to 237 inclusive, but almost, lacking only a few numbers. 10c each or \$21.00 postpaid. Have at least 230 numbers or more. Also two indexes, 1 Pioneer and Scouts of the Old West, Birthday number. War Library list and Dime Novel Catalog.

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NEGLECTED WEEKLIES By Ralph P. Smith

One of the weekly story papers that has been neglected by collectors is a Sunday publication called "Young People's Weekly." This was published by David C. Cook Publishing Co. in Chicago, and the first issue came out in 1887.

This had the largest circulation of many similar papers, such as "Boy's World," "Girl's Companion," and a dozen others; some of them also published by Cook, others by various firms who produced them for the various sects of all religions flourishing at that time. They were known as "Sunday School papers," and usually were given free to all attendants each Sunday. They all had the usual sermons, biographical tales of religious figures, and news items of secular interest. But actually, more than half the paper was devoted to novelettes, short stories, and serials of adventure, and factual articles on interesting subjects.

Of course, the stories were not exactly in the dime novel category, but they compared very favorably with tales in Youth's Companion, Golden Days, and similar household papers.

Young People's Weekly was tabloid in format, four columns to the page and eight pages per issue. It was illustrated and carried a few advertisements. The latter were carefully selected ads for stamp collectors, and those interested in printing presses. rubber stamps, etc. No one could find fault with the character of the ads.

Some of the stories were by authors who never had anything else published; perhaps they were nom-Others were written by de-plumes. familiar named authors, although I do not recall any of the really big names appearing in this weekly. One writer, at least, wrote a serial and some shorts, and was well known to dime novel readers.

John H. Whitson was his name. He wrote nearly fifty Beadle's Dime and Half-Dime Libraries under the name of Lieut. A. K. Sims. He wrote all the Jack Lightfoot novels in the 56 All Sports Library. At one time, writing for Street & Smith, he authored some of the Buffalo Bill and Diamond Dick novels. According to Mr. Adamari and Prof. Johannsen, he wrote over 50 Merriwell novels for Tip Top Weekly, including a years' work around 1900. Among his Young People's Weekly stories was the serial,

"The Young Ditch Digger."

In 1898 Cook started a monthly paperback called "New Sabbath Library." It was an unusual size being about 81/4 x61/2 inches page size. It was 96 pages, double-column. Each number had an illustrated cover in one color, usually red, blue or green: and there were several inside illustrations. There were at least 36 numbers issued, and they comprised biblical historical novels (very popular at the time), some more or less classic novels, some adventure novels, and at least one composed of 25 short stories, as well as several boys' nov-

"The Prince of the House of David" by J. H. Ingraham was very popular and appeared in many book lists. Ingraham was a minister who got himself disliked by also writing thrillers such as "Lafitte, the Pirate." His son, Prentice Ingraham wrote many Buffalo Bills for Beadle. "In His Steps" was another Sabbath Library novel (considered to be one of the biggest sellers known).

"The Ditch Diggers" appeared as #12. Another exciting boys' novel was #33 "The Isle of the Lake," by Willard Goss. Number 35 contains "Twenty Five Stories by Twenty Five Authors," and in this collection is "A Heroine of the Plains," by John H. Whitson.

There was a quantity of good reading in Young People's Weekly, and all the Sabbath Library contained well printed, well illustrated stories. It is odd that they never turn up in collections of the old story papers, magazines, and dime novels.

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- 268. Allan R. Ware, 813 West 20th Ave., Pine Bluff, Ark. 71601 (New mem.)
- 248. Walter Rigdon, P. O. Box 798, Calistoga, Calif 94515 (New address)
- 316. James Pollock, 408 Monticello Dr., Lynchburg, Va. 24501 (New address)

RECENTLY "DISCOVERED" ARTICLES CONCERNING DIME NOVELS

FROM DEADWOOD DICK TO SU-PERMAN, by Richard B. Gehman, illustrated article appearing in TO-MORROW, April 1949 issue. A well written article comparing the dime novels with the comics. (Contributed by Nils Hardin)

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